

CPP Notes 3/12/14

Present: Alexandra Lennon-Simon, Tom Flynn, Carolyn Mathews, Nancy Phillips, Gitte Venicx, Emily Axelrod, Janet Burns, Paula Cortes, Vanessa Boukili, Wayne Marshall, Martha Stearns, Kathleen Kelly, Chantal Eide, Katherine Watkins, Owen O'Riordan, Maggie Booz, Kathleen Caldara, Florrie Wescoat, David Lefcourt, Dave Webster, Ellen Coppinger, David Davis

Minutes taken by Florrie Wescoat

The meeting opened with refreshments, and we welcomed new members to the Committee, as well as DPW Commissioner Owen O'Riordan, Dave Webster (Superintendent of Parks and Forestry), Ellen Coppinger (Landscape Planner), and Katherine Watkins (City Engineer)

Meeting called to order by David Davis

At David Davis' invitation, Owen agreed to attend at least one CPP meeting per year. The replacement for Taha Jennings, the planting committee's liaison to CDD, has not yet been named, but Owen will follow up with Brian Murphy.

The format of the CPP Annual Report is still undecided. Monthly minutes play an important role in writing the report, and the report is necessary for accountability.

Owen's letter on the Massachusetts Ave. Demonstration Block was forwarded to the Committee. The major goals of the project are:

1. Establish and enhance the identity, attractiveness and walkability of the area
2. Enhance tree plantings with use of sand based structural soils (600 cu. ft. per tree); tree pits will be contiguous as much as possible. The committee would like to be aware of the recipes used for the soil mixes, given that there are a variety introduced by specialists such as James Urban and Nina Bassuk. (David Lefcourt will look into Harvard's specifications for tree plantings, which may provide insights into soil mixes, watering routines, etc. Of particular interest are the new tree plantings at the Fogg, which are in a somewhat comparable harsh urban environment.)
3. Ellen Coppinger will reach out to abutters on the demonstration block to water twice per week, and will distribute watering cans, soil moisture sensors and light-weight hoses fitted to sink hardware. Abutters will be encouraged to weed the tree wells. She and David L will work with them to select tree species from an approved list, with the hope that they will take ownership. Dave Webster weighed in that above ground hand watering is preferable to an underground irrigation system because of high maintenance requirements to assure the system is working properly.
4. Hoop fences or grates will be used at the base (4 x 8') of each tree to prevent soil compaction. Hoop fences are preferred, but when extra sidewalk space is needed, grates will be used. To avoid damage to the tree trunk, the grates will be cut back/opened up as the trees outgrow the opening.

5. In some conditions the City may use flexi-pave, a porous material used at the base of trees to prevent soil compaction by pedestrians. This material has been used in Harvard Square. Many committee members expressed a preference for the brown sample that was passed around. One drawback of the material is that it doesn't hold up to snow plows.
6. Kathy Watkins explained that the decorative brick band along the sidewalk will be set in impervious material because of ADA regulations.
7. The soft fine-textured mulch specified for the new plantings is "pony pine".

In conclusion, it was noted that many of the city's trees are suffering because of all the ongoing construction; and that Mass Avenue is a particularly difficult site for trees because of CO2, salt, vandalism and urban heat.

Gitte suggested monitoring the growth and health of these trees in the Demonstration Block to gather data and compare it with city street trees planted in smaller spaces, poorer soils, and less frequently watered. Kathy Watkins agreed to the importance of monitoring this trial.

This summer the city will have two water-by-bike employees working from June through August. It was noted that new trees will also need watering in the fall months, September through November.

David L reported that a tree hearing will be held for two trees on Whittemore Ave that may be required by law to be removed because they are growing near a high pressure gas line. David said he is personally opposed to taking them down. Owen offered to speak to his legal council to determine the risk, with the hope they can be saved. The CPP will be notified before all tree hearings.

Tom observed that the premium street trees planted on Whittemore Ave in front of D R Grace have declined because they have not been cared for or watered adequately.

The park at Elm and Hampshire is being upgraded and David L will move the Japanese maple in that area over to Sennett Park; the park space will be replanted with suitable species.

ACTION ITEMS FROM 3/12/14 HELD OVER UNTIL NEXT MTG.

NEW ACTION ITEM: David L to send list of contact information for all committee members.